

The Younger Set

By ROBERT W. CHAMBERS,
Author of "The Fighting Chance," Etc.

Copyright, 1907, by Robert W. Chambers

"Oh, but you must"—she was now dismissing him—"because, although I am convalescent, I am a little tired, and Nina's maid is waiting to tuck me in."

"So you send me away?"
"Send you?"—She hesitated, delightfully confused in the reversal of roles—not quite convinced of this new power which of itself had seemed to invest her with authority over man. "Yes," she said, "I must send you away." And her heart beat a little faster in her uncertainty as to his obedience, then leaped in triumph as he rose with a reluctance perfectly visible.

"Tomorrow," she said, "I am to drive for the first time. In the evening I may be permitted to go to the Grays' mid-Lent dance, but not to dance much. Will you be there? Didn't they



ask you? I shall tell Saddy Gray what I think of him, I don't care whether it's for the younger set or not! Goodness me, aren't you as young as anybody? Well, then, so we won't see each other tomorrow. And the day after that—oh, I wish I had my engagement list. Never mind; I will telephone you when I'm to be at home—or wherever I'm going to be. But it won't be anywhere in particular because it's Lent, of course. Good night, Captain Selwyn. You've been very sweet to me, and I've enjoyed every single instant."

When he had gone she rose, a trifle excited in the glow of abstract happiness, and walked erratically about, smiling to herself, touching and rearranging objects that caught her attention. Then an innocent instinct led her to the mirror, where she stood a moment looking back into the lovely reflected face with its disordered hair. "After all," she said, "I'm not as aged as I pretended. I wonder if he is laughing at me now. But he was very, very nice to me."

Selwyn was playing the fizzing contents of a siphon upon the iced ingredients of a tall, thin glass which stood on a table in the Lenox club.

The governor's room being deserted except by himself and Mr. Lansing, he continued the animated explanation of his delay in arriving.

"So I stayed," he said to Boots, with an enthusiasm quite boyish, "and I had a perfectly bully time. She's just as clever as she can be, starting at moments. I never half appreciated her. She formerly appealed to me in a different way, a young girl knocking at the door of the world and no mother or father to open for her and show her the gimcracks and the freaks and the sideshows. Do you know, Boots, that some day that girl is going to marry somebody, and it worries me, knowing men as I do, unless you should think of it—"

"Great James," faltered Mr. Lansing, "are you turning into a schatschen? Are you planning to waddle through the world making matches for your friends? If you are I'm quitting you right here."

"It's only because you are the dearest man I happen to know," said Selwyn resentfully. "Probably she'd turn you down anyway. But—and he brightened up—"I dare say she'll choose the best to be had. It's a pity, though."

"What's a pity?"
"That a charming, intellectual, sensitive, innocent girl like that should be turned over to a plain lump of a man."

"When you've finished your eulogy on our sex," said Lansing, "I'll walk home with you."

As the two men entered their own door and started to ascend the stairs a door on the parlor floor opened, and their landlady appeared, enveloped in a soiled crimson kimono and a false front which had slipped sideways.

"There's the sultana," whispered Lansing, "and she's making sign lan-

guage at you. Wigwag her, Phil. Oh, good evening, Mrs. Greeve! Did you wish to speak to me? Oh—to Captain Selwyn—of course!"

"If you please," said Mrs. Greeve ominously, so Lansing continued upward; Selwyn descended. Mrs. Greeve waved him into the icy parlor, where he presently found her straightening her "front" with work worn fingers.

"Captain Selwyn, I deemed it my duty to set up in order to inform you of certain specials doin's," she said haughtily.

"What doings?" he inquired.

"Mr. Erroll's, sir. Last night he evidently found difficulty with the stairs, and I seen him asleep on the parlor sofa when I come down to answer the milkman a-smokin' a cigar that wasn't lit, with his feet on the angelus."

"I'm very, very sorry, Mrs. Greeve," he said, "and so is Mr. Erroll. He and I had a little talk today, and I am sure that he will be more careful hereafter."

"There is cigar holes burned into the carpet," insisted Mrs. Greeve, "and a mercy we wasn't all insinuated in our beds, one window pane broken and the gas a blue an' whistlin' streak with the curtains blowin' into it an' a strange cat on to that satin dozydo, the proof being the repugnant perfume."

"All of which," said Selwyn, "Mr. Erroll will make every possible amends for. He is very young, Mrs. Greeve and very much ashamed, I am sure. So please don't make it too hard for him."

She stood, little slipped feet planted sturdily in the first position in dancing, fat, bare arms protruding from the kimono, her work stained fingers linked together in front of her. With a soiled thumb she turned a ring on her third finger.

"I ain't a-goin' to be mean to nobody," she said. "My gentlemen is always refined, even if they do sometimes forget themselves when young and sporty. Mr. Erroll is now abed, sir, and asleep like a cherub, ice havin' been served three times with towels extra. Would you be good enough to mention the bill to him in the mornin', the grocer bein' sniffy?" And she handed the wadded and inkly memorandum of damages to Selwyn, who pocketed it with a nod of assurance.

"There was," she added, following him to the door, "a lady here to see you twice, leavin' no name or intentions otherwise than business affairs of a pressin' nature."

"A lady?" he repeated, halting short on the stairs.

"Young and refined, allowin' for a automobile vell."

"She—she asked for me?" he repeated, astonished.

"Yes, sir. She wanted to see your rooms. But havin' no orders, Captain Selwyn, although I must say she was that polite and ladylike and," added Mrs. Greeve irrelevantly, "a art rocker come for you, too, and another for Mr. Lansing, which I placed in your respective settin' rooms."

"Oh," said Selwyn, laughing in relief, "it's all right, Mrs. Greeve. The lady who came is my sister, Mrs. Gerard, and whenever she comes you are to admit her, whether or not I am here."

"She said she might come again," nodded Mrs. Greeve as he mounted the stairs. "Am I to show her up any time she comes?"

"Certainly. Thank you," he called back. "And Mr. Gerard, too, if he calls."

He looked into Boots' room as he passed. That gentleman, in bedroom costume of peculiar exotic gorgeousness, sat stuffing a pipe with shag and poring over a mass of papers pertaining to the Westchester Air Line's property and prospective developments.

"Come in, Phil," he called out, "and look at the dinky chair somebody sent me." But Selwyn shook his head.

"Come into my rooms when you're ready," he said and closed the door again, smiling and turning away toward his own quarters. As he lighted his pipe there came a hesitating knock at the door. He jerked his head sharply. The knock was repeated.

Chapter 9

SELWYN walked swiftly to the door, flung it open full width—and stood stock still.

And Mrs. Ruthven entered the room, partly closing the door behind, her gloved hand still resting on the knob.

For a moment they confronted one another, he tall, rigid, astounded; she pale, supple, relaxing a trifle against the half closed door behind her, which yielded and closed with a low click.

At the sound of the closing door he found his voice. It did not resemble his own voice either to himself or to her, but she answered his bewildered question:

"I don't know why I came. Is it so very dreadful? Have I offended you?"

I did not suppose that men cared about conventions."

"But why on earth did you come?" he repeated. "Are you in trouble?"

"I seem to be now," she said, with a tremulous laugh. "You are frightening me to death, Captain Selwyn."

Still dazed, he found the first chair at hand and dragged it toward her.

She hesitated at the offer; then "Thank you," she said, passing before him. She laid her hand on the chair, looked a moment at him and sank into it.

Resting there, her pale cheek against her muff, she smiled at him, and every nerve in him quivered with pity.

"World—without end, amen," she said. "Let the judgment of man pass."

"The judgment of this man passes very gently," he said, looking down at her. "What brings you here, Mrs. Ruthven."

"Will you believe me?"

"Yes."

"Then it is simply the desire of the friendless for a friend, nothing else, nothing more subtle, nothing of off-frontery, n-nothing worse. Do you believe me?"

"I don't understand."

"Try to."

"Do you mean that you have differed with?"

"Him?" She laughed. "Oh, no. I was talking of real people, not of myths. And real people are not very friendly to me always, not that they are disagreeable, you understand, only a trifle overcordial, and my most intimate friend kisses me a little too frequently. By the way, she has quite succumbed to you, I hear."

"Who do you mean?"

"Why, Rosamund."

He said something under his breath and looked at her impatiently.

"Didn't you know it?" she asked, smiling.

"Know what?"

"That Rosamund is quite crazy about you. There's no use scowling and squaring your chin. Oh, I ought to know what that indicates. I've watched you do it often enough, but the fact is that the handsomest and smartest woman in town is forever dinnin' your perfections into my ears."

He drew up a chair, seated himself very deliberately and spoke, his unlighted pipe in his left hand:

"The girl I left—the girl who left me—was a modest, clean thinking, clean minded girl, who also had a brain to use and employed it. Whatever conclusion that girl arrived at concerning the importance of marriage vows is no longer my business. But the moment she confronts me again, offering friendship, then I may use a friend's privilege, as I do. And so I tell you that loosely fashionable badinage bores me. And another matter—privileged by the friendship you acknowledge—forces me to ask you a question, and I ask it, point blank, Why have you again permitted Gerald



For a moment they confronted one another.

to play cards for stakes at your house after promising you would not do so?" The color fled from her face, and her gloved fingers tightened on the arms of her chair.

"That is one reason I came," she said, "to explain."

"You could have written."

"I say it was one reason. The other I have already given you—because I—I felt that you were friendly."

"I am. Go on. Please explain about Gerald."

"Are you sure," raising her dark eyes, "that you mean to be kind?"

"Yes, sure," he said harshly. "Go on."

"You are a little rough with me, a—almost insolent."

"I—I have to be. Good God, Allice! Do you think this is nothing to me, this wretched mess we have made of life? Do you think my roughness and abruptness come from anything but pity—pity for us both, I tell you? Do you think I can remain unmoved looking on the atrocious punishment you have inflicted on yourself—tethered to—to that—for life—the poison of the contact showing in your altered voice and manner, in the things you live for, in the twisted, misshapen ideals that your friends set up on a heap of nuggets for you to worship? Even if we've passed through the sea of mire, can't we at least clear the filth from our eyes and see straight and steer straight to the anchorage?"

She had covered her pallid face with her muff. He bent forward, his hand on the arm of her chair.

Her gloved hand, moving at random, encountered his and closed on it convulsively.

"Do you understand?" he repeated.

"Yes, Phil."

Head still sinking, face covered with the silvery fur, the tremors from her body set her hand quivering on his.

Heart sick, he forbore to ask for the explanation. He knew the real answer anyway, whatever she might say, and he understood that any game in that house was Ruthven's game and the guests his guests and that Gerald was only one of the younger men who had

been wrung dry in that house.

No doubt at all that Ruthven needed the money. He had been picked up by a big, hard eyed woman who had almost forgotten how to laugh until she found him furtively muzzling her diamond laden fingers. So when she discovered that he could sit up and beg and roll over at a nod she let him follow her, and since then he had become indispensable and had curled up on many a soft and silken knee and had sought and fetched and carried for many a pretty woman what she herself did not care to touch even with white gloved fingers.

What had she expected when she married him? Only innocent ignorance of the set he ornamented could ac-



count for the horror of her disillusion. What splendors had she dreamed of from the outside? What flashing and infernal signal had beckoned her to enter? What mute eyes had promised? What silent smile invited? All skulls seem to grin, but the world has yet to hear them laugh.

"Phillip?"

"Yes, Allice."

"I did my best, without offending Gerald. Can you believe me?"

"I know you did. Don't mind what I said."

"No, not now. You do believe me, don't you?"

"Yes, I do."

"Thank you. And, Phil, I will try to s-steer straight—because you ask me."

"You must."

"I will. It is good to be here. I must not come again, must I?"

"Not again, Allice."

"On your account?"

"On your own. What do I care?"

"I didn't know. They say—"

"What?" he asked sharply.

"A rumor—I heard it—others speak of it—perhaps to be disagreeable to me."

"What have you heard?"

"That—that you might marry again."

"Well, you can nail that lie," he said hotly.

"Then it is not true?"

"True! Do you think I'd take that chance again, even if I felt free to do it?"

"Free?" she faltered. "But you are free, Phil?"

"I am not," he said fiercely. "No man is free to marry twice under such conditions. It's a jest at decency and a slap in the face of civilization! I'm done for—finished. I had my chance and I failed. Do you think I consider myself free to try again, with the chance of further bespattering my family?"

"Wait until you really love," she said tremulously.

He laughed incredulously.

"I am glad that it is not true. I am glad," she said. "Oh, Phil, Phil, for a single one of the chances we had again and again and again! And we did not know—we did not know! And yet—there were moments—"

Dry lipped he looked at her, and dry of eye and lip she raised her head and stared at him, through him, far beyond at the twin ghosts floating under the tropic stars locked fast in their first embrace.

Then she rose, blindly, covering her face with her hands, and he stumbled to his feet, shrinking back from her—because dead fires were flickering again, and the ashes of dead roses stirred above the scented embers—and the magic of all the east was descending like a veil upon them, and the phantom of the past drew nearer, smiling, wide armed, crowned with living blossoms.

The tide rose, swaying here where she stood. Her hands fell from her face. Between them the grave they had dug seemed almost filled with flowers now, was filling fast, and across it they looked at one another as though stunned. Then his face paled, and he stepped back, staring at her from stern eyes.

"Phil," she faltered, bewildered by the mirage, "is it only a bad dream, after all?" And as the false magic glowed into blinding splendor to engulf them, "Oh, boy, boy, is it hell or heaven where we've fallen?"

There came a loud rapping at the door.

(To be continued.)

ANY WANT can be supplied in The News classified column.

WHEN YOU WANT
TO SEE THE
SHOE STYLES,

STEP DOWN ON THE

Corner of Main and Broadway.

MASSIE,
The Shoe Man.

ROYAL BABY PLATE



THE RIM DOES IT! No tray No pusher
Nousing fingers
Will not upset
No spilling food

TEACHES THE BABY HOW TO EAT.

The Winn Furniture Co.

WHY BUY WATER From Oyster Dealers?

OF course, when a dealer mixes fresh water with oysters and prevails on you to buy it at the rate of from 30c to 50c per quart. HE may be smart, but aren't YOU foolish? Your water company will sell you water at a much lower rate. Now, if you want oysters only—fresh, pure, natural flavor and solid meats—no water at all—our Sealship Oysters fill the bill. Telephone an order or drop into our store.



T. E. BARNES.

An Advance for Winchester!

WE have just installed at great expense our new engine and other machinery with which we are now prepared to furnish DAY CURRENT for light and heat, and power for fans and other motors.

Let us give you estimates on this and all sorts of electric lighting.

Remember that electric light is superior to all others. It is safe, clean, cheap, comfortable, convenient, ever ready. We furnish it on meter if desired.

Winchester Railway, Light & Ice Co.

W. P. HACKETT, GENL. MGR.
P. S.—We furnish Ice in Winter as well as Summer.

It's "Plane" to be Seen



that builders and architects approve of our splendid line of millwork, for it is the oftentimes recommended for use in the best built residences. It is our boast that none can beat us in solidity of work and artistic design. We supply both hard and soft woods but all without the slightest imperfection. Easy prices, too.

Rough and Dressed Lumber.

R. P. SCOBEE & SON CO.
INCORPORATED.

IF
You WANT a cook
You WANT a situation
You WANT help
You WANT to sell
You WANT to buy
Use the classified column of

THE NEWS.